




The Face of Construction

Construction has been widely touted as the driver of Utah's current economic boom. Huge projects up and down the state, plus the continued expansion of home construction demanded by the state's high population growth rate, have swollen the ranks of Utah's construction industry. For the year 2005, the state averaged nearly 83,000 workers in construction, making an average annual wage of \$32,349—which was just slightly below the statewide average of \$32,817. With all this activity one might ask, what is the face of Utah's construction industry?

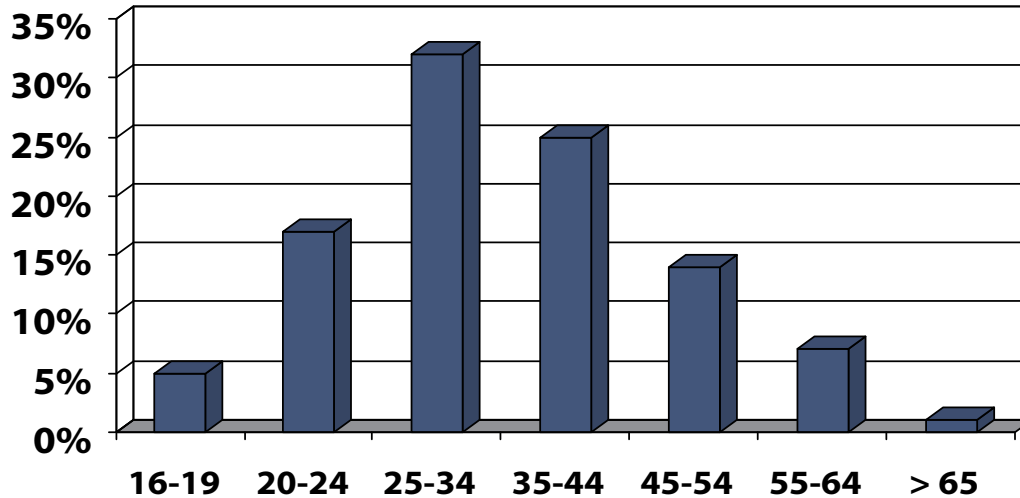
Currently, there is little hard data for the exact demographic mix of the construction industry. The little data that we do have comes from the 2004 American Community Survey (ACS). Using the ACS data we can get a rough approximation of the gender and age mix of the industry's workforce. In terms of gender, the data suggests that there were approximately 3,500 women in the industry in 2004—or 5 percent of all employees. Pooling both sexes together, we get an estimated average age of 35.1 years for workers in construction—with nearly one-third of workers in the 25-to-34 age bracket.

So what are people in construction doing? Data from the latest Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) survey provides some insights into this question. Not surprisingly, carpenters were the largest single occupation in the industry—making up roughly 13 percent of all construction employment. However, hidden in the data were some surprises. First-line supervisors and managers of construction trade workers, construction managers, and general and operations managers made up a combined 10.2 percent of jobs in the industry. Another two percent of the workforce was dedicated to working as general office clerks. Nevertheless, the bulk of the construction industry's jobs are in the occupations that you would expect: electricians, roofers, structural iron and steel workers, etc.

On the wages front, things are definitely looking up for workers in the construction industry. Looking at year-over growth rates in the industry's average annual wage it is clear that the industry has rebounded from its hard—as opposed to soft—landing after the Olympics. Preliminary data for 2005 shows the average annual wage rose a healthy 3.7 percent over 2004.

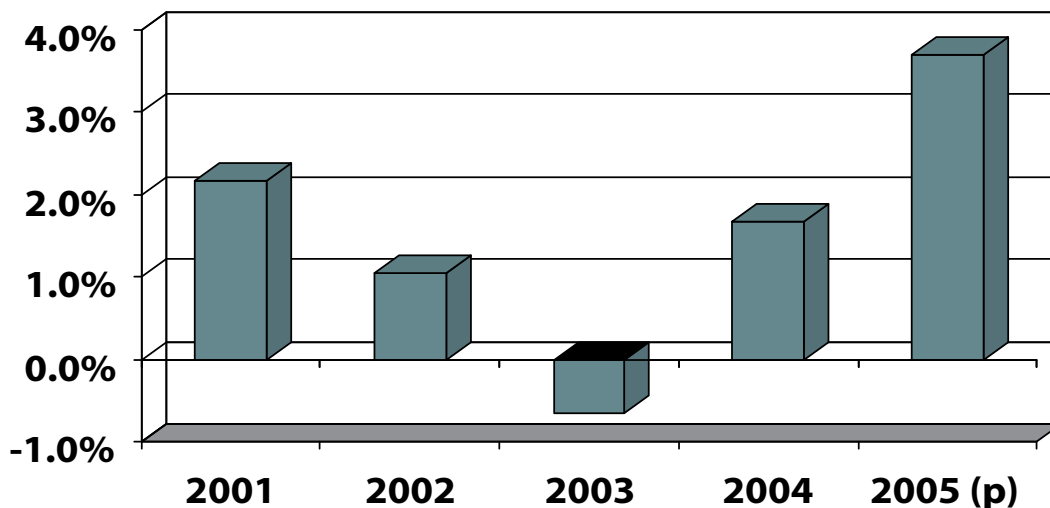
Even with all the data sources we have, some questions defy easy answers. What is the face of Utah's construction industry? For one, men continue to dominate jobs in the industry—even though programs exist to bring more women into the industry. The data also suggests that age is not as much an issue as previously thought. Finally, while wages are high, the industry's average annual wage is slightly lower than the state's overall average. 

Workers in the Construction Industry by Age Group



Source: American Community Survey (2004) Tabulation

Year-over Change in Average Annual Wages in Construction



Source: Utah Department of Workforce Services, Division of Workforce Development Information